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New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 9.55 a.m.

Agenda item 39

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/59/332)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/59/93, A/59/374)

(c) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/59/121)

Draft resolution (A/59/L.24)

The President (*spoke in French*): With regard to sub-item (b) of agenda item 39, "Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions", I would like to recall for the members of the General Assembly that, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 58/316 of 1 July 2004, the Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 17 September 2004, to allocate this sub-item to the Second Committee.

I would also like to recall for members that, as indicated in the programme of work of the General Assembly and schedule of plenary meetings (document A/INF/59/3/Rev.1), sub-item (d) of agenda item 39, "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan", will be considered in a joint debate with agenda item 27, "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security", on Wednesday, 8 December 2004.

Mr. van den Berg (Netherlands): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country Iceland member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

The issue of humanitarian coordination is at the core of the ongoing debate about improving the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian aid. The EU, along with others, has put coordination at the top of the humanitarian agenda. However, the EU believes that humanitarian coordination should not be limited to humanitarian actors alone. An effective response to today's humanitarian challenges requires us to broaden our view and to include political, military and development partners in our dialogue on humanitarian issues.

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Turning to the issue of humanitarian coordination, in humanitarian crises more than in other situation, coordination is of paramount importance. Good coordination literally saves lives. I truly believe that we can congratulate ourselves on the progress made in this particular field in recent years. I refer to the Consolidated Appeals Process and the way in which the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has been taking the lead in coordination matters. The European Union wishes to reiterate here its commitment to both the Consolidated Appeals Process and OCHA.

Moreover, I would like to explicitly express our support for the Secretary-General's Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Egeland, and his unwavering efforts not only to deal with humanitarian suffering but to make the rest of the world deal with it, too. His work in relation not only to the Darfur crisis but also to northern Uganda and Colombia are very good examples in that respect.

The Darfur crisis has not yet come to an end; time is running out for even more people. During the meeting of the Economic and Social Council, the European Union commended attempts by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to ensure access for humanitarian organizations and coordinated humanitarian action. We are currently seeing vastly improved access and far better coordinated action. However, the human suffering in Darfur is still terrible, and progress is too slow. The EU calls upon the Government of the Sudan and other parties to the conflict to better protect the civilian population. The European Union also urges the international community to do what we failed to do sufficiently in the beginning: make the relief operations possible financially.

As I said, coordination should be inclusive rather than restricted to only some stakeholders. In recent years, the discussion on humanitarian action and coordination has mainly been a debate between United Nations agencies and donor Governments. It is time for others to join the debate in a more systematic way, so as to strive for more effective aid delivery and for more sustainable results.

First, I would like to look at links between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. Developments in many countries and regions force us to do so. We have to make the transition from emergency aid to development in countries such as Afghanistan, Liberia and Angola, in order to give the people of those countries a new perspective. Although we realize that more needs to be done, when it comes to transition the European Union welcomes the work done by the Joint Working Group on Transition Issues of the United Nations Development Group and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs. Even more than during the relief phase, during transition national Governments should be given the opportunity and means to assume their responsibilities, and civil society should be given the chance and capacities to make its own positive contribution to the rebuilding of post-conflict countries. If Governments and non-government actors play those roles, the United Nations role should be limited to support and capacity-building.

Clearly, more funding is required for transition and reconstruction purposes, if only to prevent countries from reverting to conflict. Well-established funding mechanisms, which exist for humanitarian and development purposes are lacking here. The European Union is aware of that and is working on ways to improve its performance in countries in transition. The European Commission's concept for linking relief to development will provide guidance in that regard.

Humanitarian coordination must not only include national and local Governments; equally important is that the affected populations themselves are better listened to by not only just the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), but also by their own Governments. Until now, in too many cases we have all focused on working for, rather than working with, the people. By better listening to and coordinating with Governments, NGOs and affected populations, and by building local capacities, we can ensure better ownership and participation and increase the chances for sustainable results.

The voices of NGOs, international as well as national, can and should be better listened to, for instance in the framework of the consolidated appeals process and the Common Humanitarian Action Plan. NGOs have often been present in crisis areas longer than the United Nations and may have a better knowledge of tailor-made solutions for the population at risk. The European Union wants to build on NGO experience and wants to further include them in humanitarian coordination. One way of doing so might be to ensure that discussions within United Nations

country teams include all Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) partners whenever appropriate.

United Nations integrated missions are one of the symbols of improved and broadened coordination. The European Union accepts the concept of integrated missions as a more coherent and efficient approach to crises. However, it is clear that such missions include the risk of United Nations humanitarian action being perceived as part of a larger political agenda. The United Nations and its Member States must therefore organize integrated missions in such a way that there can be no misunderstanding about the independent, impartial and neutral character of the humanitarian part of a mission.

The security of humanitarian workers is at stake more than ever before. We have to find answers to the new security threats that we encounter in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The changing security environment and the United Nations response to new security challenges are extremely important for the future of humanitarian assistance. We have seen an unprecedented increase in attacks on relief workers and in the number of casualties, and the United Nations and NGOs have been forced to suspend their operations in various countries.

The European Union welcomes the opportunity to discuss that issue in the General Assembly. We acknowledge that, although the situation is more threatening in some crises than in others, new threats need to be taken into account worldwide. We therefore welcome the work done by the United Nations to reassess the changing security situation and to come up with new answers. However, the EU would urge that risk management not turn into risk aversion. Risk aversion will lead to a reduction of the United Nations response capacity and, hence, affect its credibility.

It is our firm belief that respect for international humanitarian law is not only the best way to forestall the suffering of innocent people in conflict, but also the best protection for relief workers. For the safety of relief workers, it is essential that humanitarian action and responsibility be clearly separated from military or political actors. Member States should therefore ensure coherence between their humanitarian and military policies and actions, both inside the United Nations as well as outside, and should in general further the debate between humanitarian and military actors. In that respect, we welcome the new IASC reference paper on the civil-military relationship in complex emergencies.

I should now like to say a few words on financing. The 2004 mid-year report of the OCHA highlights a number of sobering trends in that respect. Thus far in 2004, less humanitarian financing seems to have been made available than during the previous two years. Unfortunately, a new major crisis was required to increase the overall level of funding. We call upon all countries and Governments to help alleviate humanitarian suffering and to transform their pledges into payments.

Even more important, from a coordination point of view, is the uneven distribution of funding, with some appeals being better funded than others or one sector being better covered than others. That uneven distribution justifies the United Nations call for more unearmarked funding, which in turn justifies our call for better and comparable needs assessments. The European Union, which is participating in the good humanitarian donorship process, is deliberately looking for ways to fund according to needs. In order to attract more funding, United Nations agencies should better coordinate, prioritize and ensure quality.

Every year natural disasters cause more victims and suffering than man-made crises. Moreover, there is reason to believe that in the future there will be an increase in natural disasters such as floods and droughts. For those reasons and others, the European Union welcomes the renewed attention given to disaster response by the Emergency Relief Coordinator. We also support the work of the secretariat for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, especially its endeavours to prepare for the Kobe conference on disaster reduction. We believe that the decision to focus the conference on capacity-building, preparedness, coping mechanisms and ownership is a right one, because that will best limit damage and loss of lives in the long run. It is time to divert attention from disaster relief to disaster reduction, and to give an important role to national and local Governments and to people in disaster-prone areas themselves.

The European Union recognizes that the international community is failing to invest sufficiently in disaster preparedness and disaster reduction. Investing in those areas might prove to be more cost effective than investing in disaster response. However, such investment should be accompanied by

Governments giving priority to disaster-reduction policies as well as to the implementation of those policies.

On the issue of disaster response, the European Union reaffirms the leading role played by OCHA, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Standby Team and the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group. A collaboration arrangement between the existing United Nations instruments and a new European Union disaster response mechanism has recently been worked out. We look forward to seeing it implemented in the field.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, we would like to express to the Secretary-General our deep appreciation for the documents submitted under sub-items (a) and (c) of agenda item 39, entitled, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance", and in particular the report contained in document A/59/374, entitled "International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development".

The Group of 77 and China are of the opinion that the report in document A/59/374 constitutes a good basis for our discussion. The report was submitted pursuant to resolution 58/25, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the progress made in improving the international response to natural disasters and to update the activities of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group in response to resolution 57/150 and other subsequent United Nations resolutions on the issue.

The problems posed by natural disasters are of crucial importance to developing countries, given the long-term nature of those disasters and their adverse impact on affected populations and on the environment and on the social and economic development of affected countries. It is therefore crucial that we examine the measures that must be taken to improve the response capacity of affected countries and the assistance that the international community can provide in that regard.

In that connection, I would like to emphasize that the guidelines contained in the annex to resolution 46/182, adopted on 19 December 1991, constitute the main pillars for humanitarian assistance for the Group of 77 and China. As set out in that resolution, the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality are the guidelines for all measures undertaken in providing humanitarian assistance in natural disasters. It is essential that humanitarian assistance not be politicized and that it be provided at the request of concerned Governments. Those principles have been, and continue to be, the basis for all responses to humanitarian emergency requests for assistance. They should therefore constitute the criteria by which we measure the effectiveness of the assistance of the United Nations and other actors.

In that context, the primary responsibility for the organization and delivery of humanitarian assistance should fall on the States concerned. It is also fundamental to build strong capacities at the regional and national levels in order to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and other humanitarian assistance organizations. The States whose populations are in need of emergency humanitarian assistance as a result of natural disasters should endeavour to facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations, in particular by safeguarding the delivery of food, shelter and medical help.

As the Secretary-General has pointed out in his report, the strengthening of the national response capacity remains one of the most effective means of carrying out rapid assessments of situations and coordinating the initial response, given that local responders are better able to overcome many obstacles that can hinder rapid response in such disasters. While it may not be possible to prevent natural disasters, early warning and preparedness could help mitigate their impact, particularly in terms of the human suffering caused by natural disasters.

The use of space-based and remote-sensing technologies is particularly important in preventing, managing and mitigating natural disasters. There is therefore an urgent need to promote access to and transfer of technology related to early warning systems to developing countries affected by natural disasters. It is also of paramount importance to strengthen national capacities, to transfer appropriate technologies and to develop early warning systems to avoid or minimize the impact of natural disasters.

The Group of 77 and China would like to emphasize the need to ensure more equitable

distribution of humanitarian assistance across humanitarian emergencies, including those of a protracted nature. We have noted that the assistance provided in emergency situations that enjoyed wide media coverage has been abundant. By contrast, as soon as the media lights fade, resources tend to become scarce. That is particularly so in certain areas when the more difficult task of recovery and reconstruction begins. In that regard, the Group of 77 and China would like to reiterate the importance of strengthening international cooperation, particularly through the effective use of multilateral mechanisms, to provide humanitarian assistance during all phases of a disaster, from relief to mitigation to development, including through the provision of adequate resources. The Group of 77 and China would also like to underscore the importance of the international community's fully taking into account the specific needs of least developed countries facing natural disasters.

The Group of 77 and China once again reaffirm that voluntary contributions for humanitarian assistance should not impact negatively on the resources allocated to international cooperation for development.

In accordance with the practice in previous sessions, the Group of 77 and China will submit a draft resolution on international cooperation in humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development. The Group of 77 is very pleased at the growing support that that draft resolution has received and looks forward to the growing international consensus around that issue this year. That consensus constitutes a message of hope to those affected by natural disasters every year.

Ms. Rouse (Grenada): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on this agenda item. CARICOM, while aligning itself with the statement made by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, would like to make the following additional remarks.

CARICOM would like to thank the Secretary-General for his reports on this agenda item and also Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his presentation to the General Committee yesterday.

The Caribbean region has been devastated by hurricanes in the past few months. From Trinidad and Tobago in the south to the Bahamas in the north, hardly any State has been left untouched. The Bahamas and Cuba were each struck by more than one hurricane, while Jamaica suffered extensive property damage and economic losses. However, the two countries in our region that were most severely affected were Grenada and Haiti.

In Haiti, extensive flooding caused by Hurricane Jeanne in Gonaives resulted in the loss of more than 1,900 lives and affected 90 per cent of the population in that city. Gonaives became completely cut off, and there were widespread shortages of food, water, shelter and other basic necessities of life. Fortunately, as we all know, the United Nations already had a strong presence in Haiti, and the various agencies were able to mobilize themselves quickly and provide essential supplies of food and water as well as emergency shelter for the affected population.

Grenada suffered major destruction as a result of the passage of Hurricane Ivan on 7 September and experienced a most horrifying period thereafter. Neighbouring Caribbean nations reached out helping hands to Grenada, but the magnitude of the devastation in that country is beyond the capacity of the Caribbean to address satisfactorily by itself.

In a matter of hours, Grenada went from being a middle-income developing country with a well-run administrative State machinery to a ravaged land. It is ironic as well as lamentable that it took this disastrous hurricane season to reinforce the point that the small island developing States have been making for some time — namely the need for special and differential treatment because of, among other things, our vulnerability to natural disasters.

The United Nations agencies in the Caribbean responded quickly and efficiently to the regional emergencies. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) performed its coordinating role commendably, while the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also reacted to the immediate needs of the people.

The Flash Appeal organized at United Nations Headquarters on 24 September, targeted at helping Haiti and Grenada, was instrumental in highlighting

the problems as well as procuring assistance for these two nation-States.

We are hopeful that the monies pledged to both countries by the Flash Appeal as well as the donors' conference in Washington, D.C., will be disbursed as quickly as practicable. When the fabric of a country is destroyed, help is needed immediately — not only to provide emergency aid to the population, but also to start the reconstruction process. CARICOM proposes that the United Nations should seek to enhance the means of accessing and utilizing funds promised by the donor community to countries in crisis.

We believe, based on the Grenada experience, that it is crucial for the United Nations agencies in the region to have a mechanism that will enable a more timely implementation of programmes and a more rapid disbursement of funds.

Given the importance of this issue, we would also like to call for enhanced cooperation and collaboration between the United Nations agencies in the Caribbean and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA), which is the agency responsible for disaster management in the Caribbean.

The United Nations and its agencies have provided, over time, critical help for CARICOM countries affected by natural disasters. UNDP has supported disaster mitigation, capacity-building and institutional strengthening in support of Montserrat's post-emergency resettlement programme. CARICOM is grateful for the support received over time, and this statement is intended to reflect not only that gratitude but also the hope that the suggested mechanism of enhanced cooperation and collaboration with our regional agencies will benefit the peoples in our region.

Mr. Wali (Nigeria): Let me start by expressing my country's profound condolences to the Palestinian people on the untimely death of their leader, Chairman Yasser Arafat. May the Almighty God be with the Palestinian people, and may light perpetual shine upon their fallen hero.

Turning to the issue before us today, and speaking on behalf of the African Union, I should like to welcome the ongoing efforts of the United Nations aimed at strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. For us in Africa, the unenviable record of conflicts on the continent underscores the importance attached to policy coherence and coordination among both donors and United Nations agencies in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The pivotal role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) cannot be overemphasized.

We in Africa continue to lament the existence of a serious gap between relief and development, which must be addressed in order to ensure a smooth transition from humanitarian emergency assistance to post-conflict reconstruction and development. We continue to lament also the lack of adequate local capacities to ensure that the long-term needs of the affected population continue to be addressed.

The past decade has witnessed increasingly violent conflicts and complex humanitarian challenges. In the face of these realities, the African Union has undertaken institutional and political reforms to address those challenges on the continent in the framework of its Constitutive Act and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The efforts of the African Union in Burundi and, more recently, in the Darfur region of the Sudan, through the establishment of the Ceasefire Commission and the expanded African mission in the Sudan, are clear demonstrations of the renewed commitment of African leaders for the African Union to assert itself on the continent.

It is therefore with great anticipation that we await the release in a few weeks of the report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, with the expectation that many of the issues highlighted in today's debate will be duly addressed.

In discussing this important agenda item, one cannot but be reminded of the tragic events which unfolded in Rwanda in 1994 and which clearly required emergency humanitarian intervention on the part of the international community. The consequences of our failed efforts continue to haunt us even today through the eyes of the survivors, such as orphans, widows and victims of sexual violence, as well as people afflicted with HIV/AIDS.

Last year, in this very Hall, the Assembly, through a well-celebrated commemorative ceremony, renewed the hope of both victims and survivors by sending a clear message that the international community has not forgotten, and will not forget, the tragic events of Rwanda, and that, more importantly,

that the international community will ensure that such heinous acts will never again be repeated in Africa or in any other part of the world.

It will be recalled that it was on the basis of an African Union resolution that this world body unanimously adopted resolution 58/234, by which it designated 7 April as the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda. In the same resolution the Assembly

> "Encourages all Member States, organizations of the United Nations system and other relevant international organizations to consider promoting implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Independent Inquiry into the actions of the United Nations during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda".

Building on that General Assembly resolution, the Executive Council of the African Union, at its session in Addis Ababa last July, adopted Decision EX.CL/Dec.154(V) in which it requested the African Union and the United Nations to implement the recommendations contained in the reports of the International Panel of Eminent Personalities commissioned by the Organization of African Unity, and those contained in the report of the Independent Inquiry into the actions of the United Nations during the 1994 Rwanda genocide, commissioned by the Secretary-General — also known as the "Carlsson report".

It is therefore in that connection that I wish to bring to the fore of this debate today, under this agenda item — which we in the African Union believe to be the most appropriate forum — and to advocate the plight of the survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, particularly the orphans, widows and victims of sexual violence. The African Union is convinced that effective and well-resourced programmes to assist the survivors would not only restore their dignity but would help promote reconciliation and healing in Rwanda.

At this juncture I should like to express, on behalf of the African Union, appreciation to the donor community and United Nations agencies for the assistance provided to the Government and people of Rwanda since the 1994 genocide.

The African Union intends to table a resolution under this agenda item in the weeks ahead, aimed at ensuring that adequate assistance is directed towards support for the genocide survivors in Rwanda. The African Union would appreciate the support of the international community, as was the case last year.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China): The Chinese delegation would like to thank the representative of Qatar for the statement he delivered on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Chinese delegation also wishes to thank the Secretary-General for the reports he has submitted under this item and contained in documents A/59/93, A/59/332 and A/59/374, among others. China also takes this opportunity to express its appreciation to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which under the leadership of Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland has made great efforts to coordinate the humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

My delegation has observed that in his report on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/59/93), the Secretary-General cited many facts and figures in his overview and assessment of such assistance for the past year. The report noted that natural disasters remain a global threat and that frequent armed conflicts and the plight of tens of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, coupled with the threat posed by the rampant spread of HIV/AIDS, have made humanitarian assistance even more challenging.

The increase in recent years in the diversity of humanitarian actors, including armed forces, non-governmental organizations and private sector entities, highlights the need to strengthen coordination. It should be emphasized that in providing humanitarian assistance to the affected countries, the United Nations and the international community should be guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality established in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182, and that such assistance should be provided at the request and with the consent of the affected country, whose wishes, culture and customs should be respected.

Natural disasters and complex emergency situations have led to an increased demand for humanitarian assistance. Adequate funding is the prerequisite for carrying out assistance activities. The United Nations Inter-agency Consolidated Appeal Process has played an important role in humanitarian

funding. However, we are concerned that in recent years there has been a steady decline in resources mobilized through that channel and hope that OCHA will step up its efforts in that respect. At the same time, we appeal once again to the donor countries that are able to do so to make greater contributions to humanitarian assistance.

The safety and security of United Nations humanitarian personnel has become a subject of growing concern. Since last year, United Nations personnel engaged in humanitarian assistance have continued to come under attack and have even been taken as hostages and detained for long periods. In the bomb attack on the United Nations office in Iraq last year, 24 United Nations personnel, including the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, made the ultimate sacrifice, while many others were injured. The United Nations suffered devastating losses in that incident. The Chinese delegation strongly condemns such terrorist acts.

In August this year, China acceded to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. Following that, the Chinese Government has taken part in activities that promote the safety of United Nations personnel pursuant to the provisions of the Convention. China will work with other States parties in fulfilling its treaty obligations.

China is a disaster-prone country that is frequently hit by earthquakes, floods, droughts and other disasters, suffering heavy losses as a result. Last year, China suffered a direct economic loss of over $20 billion due to the effects of natural disasters. In spite of that, the Chinese Government has, within its capabilities and through bilateral channels, provided emergency and humanitarian relief goods such as food, medicines, mosquito nets, tents and blankets to developing countries affected by disasters. Last year, China's rescue team joined the search and rescue efforts in Bam, Iran, in the aftermath of an earthquake. These assistance activities have fully demonstrated our compassion for, and solidarity and friendship with, the affected Governments and peoples.

The Chinese delegation supports the proposal by the Secretary-General with regard to the transition from relief to development in humanitarian assistance for natural disasters. The proposal will help increase the capacity of the affected countries in their rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.

In areas such as disaster management and improving search and rescue capabilities, we are ready to share our experiences and information with other countries with a view to enhancing international cooperation in those fields.

In conclusion, the Chinese delegation would like to thank OCHA for the attention and assistance it has given to disaster-affected areas in China over the past year. We offer our support for the recent initiative by Mr. Egeland on building partnerships with Asian countries in order to enhance international cooperation in disaster relief.

Mr. Baum (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland attaches particular importance to the discussion on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian aid. All Member States and observers are thus given the opportunity to undertake a necessary exchange of views on the essential areas of United Nations action. We note that the general trends analysed by the Secretary-General in his report have been confirmed by the facts to date. Allow me to refer to some of the cases of greatest concern, in which awareness of the problem and the will to act remain slow, in the view of my delegation.

First, humanitarian organizations' unconditional access, without obstacles, to people in distress must be guaranteed. We must find ways of improving, in a tangible way and without delay, the protection of civilian populations, particularly women and children. We also need to strengthen cooperation between the various bodies of the United Nations, while at the same time respecting their individual mandates.

Secondly, with regard to the management of the security system of the United Nations as a whole, the report of the Secretary-General correctly stresses the shortcomings of the system currently in place, which does not allow the Organization to effectively deal with all of the challenges that it must face. We would like to point out that it is, first and foremost, the host Government that must ensure that security is sufficient. Moreover, we see that the humanitarian imperative to ease suffering wherever it occurs has led agencies and humanitarian organizations to increase their exposure to risk, at the cost of the unacceptable loss of many lives. In this respect, we stress the importance of basic and ongoing training in matters of security at all levels

and throughout the United Nations system, and we would urge that security system management be included in the regular budget of the Organization. We would also urge that attacks against humanitarian staff be condemned with the utmost firmness, and that those guilty be punished according to national provisions and international obligations, such as the provisions of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Thirdly, we are convinced that one of the most effective ways to improve in a sustainable way the protection of civilian populations, as well as the security of staff, property and buildings of humanitarian organizations, involves respecting, without exception, the provisions of international humanitarian law. Both State and non-State parties must at all times respect and ensure the respect of every provision of the Geneva Conventions. Switzerland calls upon all States that have not yet done so to ratify the additional protocols to the above-mentioned conventions, as well as the Rome Statute of the ICC.

We would like to reiterate the singular nature of humanitarian action, which must remain based on universally recognized principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. In that respect, two concrete issues merit our attention.

First, protection and assistance activities must be planned, implemented and assessed by civilian humanitarian staff, and in that connection we invite these humanitarian staff with a specific protection mandate to strengthen that mandate. We also have to take due account of the specificity of humanitarian action in setting up the so-called integrated missions of the United Nations.

Switzerland attaches high priority to the qualitative improvement of the coordination of international humanitarian action by means of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, particularly by developing joint methodologies for assessing needs, by establishing strict behavioural norms for humanitarian staff and by integrating HIV/AIDS awareness in the agendas of humanitarian organizations. We particularly welcome the recent conclusion and current dissemination of the operational guidelines for resident coordinators and country teams for the implementation of a collaborative approach in dealing with internal displacement.

Finally, we support the Secretary-General's recommendations according to which a direct conceptual link must be established between, on the one hand, the response in the case of natural and man-made disasters, and on the other, the strengthening of prevention and preparation activities in emergency situations. National authorities bear the primary responsibility in those efforts and that must be stressed, as must the need to involve all stakeholders in preparation and prevention, if we are to attain sustainable results. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which will be held in Kobe in January 2005, represents a unique opportunity to increase awareness at all levels.

Mr. Siv (United States): I thank the Secretary-General for his thorough and wide-ranging reports on humanitarian assistance. He has recognized our successes as an international community and has also pointed out where we continue to fall short of expectations.

Last year, I optimistically spoke in the Assembly of a glimmer of hope for the future of the Sudan. While I still hope that peace is possible, I despair at the continuing humanitarian tragedy in Darfur. Villages have been burned and hundreds of thousands displaced. Women have been raped. Men, women and children have been killed. Civilians have been taken hostage. Both parties to the conflict have obstructed humanitarian access. The Sudanese Government has forcibly relocated civilians from camps for internally displaced persons. This is in direct contravention of international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions 1556 (2004) and 1564 (2004).

United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and others are carrying out admirable work to save lives in Darfur. The United States has contributed over $300 million in humanitarian aid to Darfur and eastern Chad since the beginning of the conflict. This already exceeds our pledges for the entire fiscal year, and we will give more. We applaud the decision of the Security Council to meet in Nairobi to highlight the need for the conflicting parties in the Sudan to restore peace to the country. We continue to support the work of the African Union and its efforts to expand its monitoring presence in Darfur.

However, we must work together to provide far better protection for civilians. A lack of coordination

among United Nations agencies on the ground in emergency situations continues to plague humanitarian efforts in the Sudan and elsewhere. We encourage the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and United Nations agencies to establish clear leadership in assisting and protecting internally displaced persons. We commend the establishment of the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division within OCHA. That will provide clear leadership in meeting the unique humanitarian needs of the internally displaced.

In addition to United States financial support for the Division, last month the United States Agency for International Development finalized its policy on assistance to internally displaced persons. It is our intention to ensure that that policy statement will both reaffirm our commitment to meeting the needs of such persons and enhance the coordination and reliability of the response, both within our Government and in the greater humanitarian community.

The United States applauds the work being done by humanitarian workers throughout the world, who bring hope and life to people in need. We lament the loss of two NGO staff in the Sudan during the past month. The United States appreciates the attempt by United Nations agencies to balance the crucial need to provide for the safety and security of humanitarian personnel with the need to reach victims of emergencies. That and other challenges have led my country to contribute to the independent evaluation of the impact of integrated humanitarian aid missions that is being jointly managed by OCHA and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. We look forward to learning from the results of that study in early 2005.

As we begin humanitarian negotiations during the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, let us take steps aimed at alleviating humanitarian crises and reducing the effects of natural disasters throughout the world.

Mr. Løvald (Norway): The concept of integrated missions for United Nations peace operations has a number of important dimensions. In my intervention today, I will focus on the humanitarian dimension, closely linked, as it is, with the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

Norway supports the integrated-mission approach. We see it as a way of creating greater coherence in the activities of the United Nations, making it more effective in managing crises, in restoring peace and security and in creating stability and good governance in failed or failing States. The military and civilian police elements of such missions have a crucial role in establishing security, which is an essential precondition for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

We have already gained some experience in mission integration, although we lack a clearly defined model. It is probably neither possible nor desirable to establish a rigid organizational template for integrated missions. Mission design must be adapted to the particular circumstances in a given area. Integration provides a sense of direction, but it needs to be practised wisely if we are to make full use of the skills and competencies of the various parts of the United Nations system in the humanitarian, development and peacekeeping areas.

The recent experience of integrated missions in a country such as Liberia has caused concern in the humanitarian community. While some of the tension observed may be specific to that situation, the debate has brought to the surface the inherent dilemma of how to maximize the gains from integration while minimizing its costs to the humanitarian role of the United Nations. Several questions need to be asked. Is it at all possible to have a clear command and control structure while at the same time separating humanitarian or development operations from the political and military elements? Should integrated planning at the Headquarters level be the upper limit of our ambition? If not, how can we ensure that the necessary space for humanitarian action is maintained within an integrated mission framework in field operations?

We appreciate the Organization's awareness of the urgent need to profit from lessons learned and to identify best practices. Norway would like to commend the expanded core group of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs for initiating a joint independent study of issues relating to the interface among peacekeeping, humanitarian and development activities in integrated missions. As a major humanitarian actor, the United Nations must itself ensure that humanitarian action is in line with the fundamental principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality. The Organization cannot risk compromising those principles by having humanitarian

action too closely associated with a military or political mission.

In our view, the more active a conflict is, the stronger is the case for maintaining a clear and visible distinction between humanitarian agencies, on the one hand, and the political and military parts of a United Nations operation, on the other. The way in which the parties involved perceive that distinction has a direct bearing on the security of humanitarian personnel. Protection measures can certainly be taken to increase the security and safety of humanitarian workers, but such measures may also reduce the workers' access to those who need their protection and assistance. The support and confidence of the local population and of the parties to the conflict have traditionally been the best protection for humanitarian workers. The new safety and security measures are not likely to compensate for the loss of such legitimacy.

The serious deterioration in the situation of humanitarian workers in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq has made them deliberate targets — "soft targets" — for actors with violent political agendas. In that respect, this year's report of the Secretary-General (A/59/93) is no less alarming than last year's, which pointed out "a disturbing trend of blatant disrespect for humanitarian work" (*A/58/89, para. 11*). The international community cannot ignore those serious challenges.

There is a need for greater awareness of the practical dilemmas and risks that are likely to arise in the interface between military and humanitarian action in the field. Norway appreciates the work done in the United Nations to develop generic and specific guidelines for such interaction. The focus should now be on bridging the gap between those guidelines and military doctrine and practice.

When military personnel perform humanitarian or reconstruction projects to win over the hearts and minds of the local population, there is a risk of blurring military and humanitarian roles, which can give rise to misconceptions regarding humanitarian work. In our view, the United Nations must organize its missions in such a way that they can contribute to the maintenance and, where necessary, to the restoration of a humanitarian space. That is no less important when humanitarian action takes place alongside non-United Nations peacekeeping or multilateral forces.

Norway has been a staunch supporter of a strong United Nations role in the coordination of all humanitarian action in a crisis area. We must not get to the point where the humanitarian community outside the United Nations prefers not to be associated with a United Nations mission because the mission may be perceived as undermining basic humanitarian principles. Integrated missions could drive a wedge between United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian agencies, which could be a serious setback to the Organization's lead role in the humanitarian field. Weakening international coordination would also have a broad negative impact on the humanitarian cause.

The Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) plays a key role in enhancing the position of the United Nations in the coordination of humanitarian assistance, but that is contingent upon the involvement of all relevant actors. In cases where the CAP is replaced by mechanisms that also address transitional and long-term issues, it is vital that the development of a common humanitarian action plan be inclusive. A common understanding of the humanitarian context, of needs assessments and of the roles and responsibilities of all humanitarian actors is essential if coordination is to be effective.

We welcome the forthcoming United Nations launch of a work plan for the Sudan for 2005. That is a positive step but, in the present phase of the peace negotiations and peace planning, it is important to avoid duplication in the planning and coordination processes. It is therefore critical that the United Nations work plan be produced and launched in partnership with all relevant actors.

The future of the concept of integrated missions depends upon whether such missions can in practice reconcile the fulfilment of the various mandates of their component parts with a more coherent United Nations response in the field, thereby producing the desired impact on the overall peace process. A more coherent response is not in and of itself a sufficient criterion for judging the success of an integrated mission. The manner in which the humanitarian component is integrated has broad ramifications that extend beyond the peace process in question. An open and honest debate on those issues should be encouraged.

Mr. Ravi (India): We would like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports presented under this item and for the useful introduction provided by the Under-Secretary-General of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

We associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Before making my substantive comments on the agenda item under discussion today, I should like to pay tribute to the memory of President Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestinian people for almost four decades. I had the privilege of meeting Yasser Arafat during his visit to India in the mid-1980s. Like millions of others around the world, I too was struck by his charismatic leadership. On behalf of India, and on my own behalf, I join others in conveying condolences to the Palestinian leadership and the members of the bereaved family.

The number of countries requiring humanitarian assistance as a result of complex emergencies has remained constant over the past year. The overall requirements for humanitarian assistance remain at approximately the same level as in previous years. We note with concern, however, that the pattern of funding humanitarian activities remains uneven, leaving some countries substantially under-financed. The case of the Central African Republic, which received only 5 per cent of its requirements in 2003, is the most glaring example of that. That underscores the importance of allocating resources fairly to all countries in need. The United Nations should be seen to be above humanitarian favouritism and seen as not forgetting those humanitarian emergencies that no longer have the benefit of the so-called CNN effect. In order to do that, the United Nations must avoid regional imbalances and uneven funding of humanitarian needs. Only then will universal trust in the United Nations system be preserved.

The allocation and availability of resources for humanitarian assistance remain matters of vital concern. We therefore support the Secretary-General's recommendation inviting donors to continue efforts to make available increased amounts of earmarked funding for relief assistance. We also support the need for some predictability in the funding provided for humanitarian activities. However, situations of humanitarian emergencies are mostly unpredictable. How funding can be provided for such activities on a totally predictable basis therefore remains unclear.

The problems associated with the way humanitarian assistance and humanitarian actors are perceived have emerged as an area of concern in recent years. Continuing attacks on humanitarian workers in some situations of conflict have caused those questions to be of growing concern to the United Nations and the international community. Attacks on humanitarian personnel must be condemned as unjustified.

The report also notes that warring parties must recognize the neutral and impartial nature of humanitarian action. That is understandable. However, for that to happen, United Nations humanitarian action should not only be neutral, but also be seen to be neutral. We would underscore the need for broad transparency, accountability and a democratic intergovernmental process of debate and agreement. Humanitarian assistance should strictly abide by the basic principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality, as set out in Assembly resolution 46/182. Humanitarian action should also be apolitical and offered at the request of the recipient Government. Those principles should also hold good for integrated missions. The concern of the Secretary-General on the question of access in providing humanitarian assistance is well placed. However, the issuance of visas, travel permits and custom clearances fall within the purview of the national Governments.

Giving humanitarian action a local face could be helpful in conveying the right message behind the humanitarian action. Humanitarian assistance personnel should in the main be hired with the principle of geographical proximity in mind and with due attention paid to the importance of the familiarity of the personnel with the location and nature of a given crisis. That could be done by including personnel who belong to the area or who have prior experience with similar emergencies. Both the efficiency and the perception of humanitarian action might be improved in that way. The report also speaks of the need for humanitarian personnel to be sensitive to local customs and traditions. Local resources, procured locally or from the neighbourhood, and the use of locally hired transport would be seen as a positive measure by recipients of humanitarian assistance, apart from building capacity locally and reducing time delays. Regional approaches, where possible or applicable, might also be useful.

For humanitarian assistance to be effective in situations involving a multiplicity of actors, the coordination function should not be allowed to overwhelm humanitarian action on the ground, lest the former should become the most important preoccupation of the humanitarian effort. Where such coordination becomes necessary, the national Government would be best placed to coordinate humanitarian assistance. We would also underscore the need to fully respect the principle of national sovereignty.

Mr. Haraguchi (Japan): Although there have been some positive developments in the field of humanitarian assistance, such as the repatriation of a large number of refugees, serious humanitarian crises and disaster spots still remain — and are in some cases even increasing in various parts of the world. It is really moving to hear of the assistance activities being carried out by brave and kind-hearted humanitarian workers in those places. However, it is becoming all the more urgent for us to find an effective answer to the question of how we are to maintain humanitarian assistance activities in high-risk environments in which humanitarian workers are increasingly exposed to danger.

We believe it is time to re-examine the basic objectives of our humanitarian assistance under the current circumstances. Given the enormous needs and the limited resources available, I am afraid our humanitarian assistance would not be sustainable, if its basic objective were simply to perpetually provide people in distress with the necessary assistance. In our view, our humanitarian assistance must be geared toward creating a situation in which people can live without assistance. Let me elaborate a little on that point.

We believe that a proper combination of ownership on the part of the people in need and partnership on the part of the outside supporters is the key to creating a situation where humanitarian assistance eventually becomes unnecessary. The sense of ownership derives from the fact that the people themselves own their lives, dignity and future; partnership on the part of the international community stems from the belief it has the duty to help those in dire straits who are trying to help themselves. Our humanitarian assistance should not become a one-way transaction, with charity going from donors to recipients. In our view, it should be based on joint undertaking between donors and recipients as equal partners. We have learned from our experience that the proactive participation of recipients in the planning and implementing phases of humanitarian assistance makes that assistance more effective.

For example, there have been cases in which we assigned traditional leaders a central role in the management of refugee camps at the suggestion of the refugees themselves. Those leaders turned out to be quite successful. I believe that that kind of approach is very much in line with the concept of human security that Japan has been promoting, one that tries to protect people in distress and encourage them to develop a sense of ownership of their destiny and to empower them, in response to their ownership, through partnership. Of course, that approach has to be promoted in close collaboration with the Government of the country concerned.

There are several points that I consider important in making this approach successful. The first is the need to expand the base of the partnership. The number of actors should be increased to include as many as possible of those who participate in humanitarian assistance activities on the basis of shared humanitarian considerations. Humanitarian assistance need not and should not be the monopoly of developed countries. South-South cooperation should also be explored. That is why Japan enthusiastically supports Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland's efforts to expand partnership, particularly with Asian countries.

The second is the need to go down into the field. To carry out humanitarian assistance effectively, we always have to be attentive to the concrete needs of people on the ground, unfettered by prejudice. In that context, we attach importance to frank dialogue with people in need. By doing so, we believe we will be able to understand the real, specific and concrete needs of people in distress and foster their sense of ownership. For example, it was because of such frank dialogue that Japan started contributing to the school feeding programme of the World Food Programme. We found that the programme very well matched the actual needs of the people because it benefited the local community three times: by purchasing agricultural products from the local community, by providing meals to children at school and by giving them additional meals to eat at home.

Thirdly, in order to provide humanitarian assistance that leads to reconstruction, development and, eventually, a durable solution to a humanitarian crisis, a holistic approach is needed, with close collaboration among those engaging in conflict prevention, peace-building and development. It is essential to overcome the so-called gap between emergency relief and reconstruction. Recognizing that, Japan is now, for example, undertaking a comprehensive regional development programme called the Ogata Initiative in one region of Afghanistan. That programme aims at making a seamless transition from relief to development. In adopting such a holistic approach, we believe it is important that the experience and know-how of the United Nations country team be fully respected. Close coordination between peacekeeping operations and humanitarian and reconstruction efforts is indispensable, and the activities of a country team under a resident coordinator or a humanitarian coordinator should be fully utilized in such coordinated efforts, with due consideration of the costs and benefits.

So far, I have been discussing assistance to the victims of man-made miseries. However, we should not forget that there are also natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, droughts, typhoons, hurricanes and cyclones. Sometimes, hundreds of thousands of people lose their lives or their livelihoods. We also need to be prepared to mitigate the damage caused by natural disasters. Japan is to host the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe next January. At the conference, we hope to discuss desirable ways of sharing the experiences and know-how of each country with a view to strengthening the resilience of nations and communities in the face of disasters and ways of fostering partnership among the participating countries, international agencies and stakeholders.

We need to discuss humanitarian principles more actively at the United Nations, with a view to providing appropriate guidance to the relevant humanitarian actors. But it is meaningless to repeat the same discussions in the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. One idea would be to give each organ a different focus. For example, the Economic and Social Council might aim at providing guidance to United Nations agencies in discharging their humanitarian mandates, and the General Assembly might strive to discuss fundamental values to be shared in humanitarian assistance. That is just one idea. We welcome other innovative ideas on revitalizing our work in the field of humanitarian assistance and hope to deepen our discussion in order to achieve more effective humanitarian activities.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like, on behalf of the United Arab Emirates, to extend my sincerest condolences to the brotherly people of Palestine, its leadership and the family of the late President Yasser Arafat. We reaffirm the support of the United Arab Emirates for the Palestinian people and leadership in their efforts to realize their legitimate rights and goals of establishing an independent State in Palestine.

I associate myself with the statement made by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. I also thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his valuable report on the topic of humanitarian assistance. We fully agree with the conclusions of the report on the tragic humanitarian conditions of millions of people around the world and the challenges and dangers facing relief assistance operations.

The United Arab Emirates would like to express its appreciation for the work done by the United Nations in the field of humanitarian and relief assistance and wishes to underline the principal role of the United Nations in monitoring and evaluating humanitarian and relief assistance. We support the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General, especially those related to helping poor countries build their national institutional capacities and to establishing the necessary coordination among all humanitarian assistance organizations in order to meet the challenges and dangers posed by natural disasters and wars, by means of an international strategy to deal with natural disasters at all stages, from early warning to relief, reconstruction and development.

In that context, we urge the donor countries and the international financing institutions to increase their contributions in order to fund humanitarian and relief activities in fulfilment of the principles of international solidarity and interdependence, and the United Nations Charter. In the meantime, we emphasize the importance of strengthening the authority and role of international law in settling disputes and eliminating the causes of

armed conflicts, which all cause humanitarian disasters. We also reaffirm the importance of taking the necessary measures to protect humanitarian personnel and to compensate them for any losses they incur.

The report of the Secretary-General outlines the tragic humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, where more than 3,000 innocent civilians were killed as a result of continuing random military attacks by the Israeli occupation forces. The report also refers to the curfews and closures imposed by the Israeli occupation forces, which have resulted in huge losses to the Palestinian economy.

Israeli practices included the construction of an expansionist wall, land confiscation and the destruction of wells, all of which led to an increase in the levels of unemployment, poverty and internally displaced persons. The latter have reached 16,000 persons, unemployment has reached 30 per cent and those living under poverty levels amount to nearly 63 per cent. Twenty-two per cent of Palestinian children also suffer from malnutrition. On the basis of this we again call upon the international community to intervene decisively, to end the humanitarian tragedy that the Palestinian people are living under, to force Israel to cease immediately its military attacks and to end the policy of closures and siege of Palestinian towns and cities.

The United Arab Emirates notes with grave concern the difficulties and dangers that personnel working in delivering humanitarian assistance are facing, particularly the Palestinians who face problems in providing this assistance because of the violence and the constraints of Israeli forces restricting mobility. We call upon Israel to provide protection for those who work in humanitarian assistance organizations, and to facilitate the work in accordance with international law and treaties.

In recognizing the importance of humanitarian and development assistance and of promoting security and peace in the world, the United Arab Emirates has fulfilled all of its financial obligations to the United Nations humanitarian assistance activities, the last of which was a contribution of $1,028,000 to reconstruction next year, as well as providing $30 million for reconstruction in Afghanistan and $215 million for reconstruction in Iraq. Aside from that, the United Arab Emirates provided direct development assistance to many developing countries through its national organizations, such as Abu Dhabi Development Fund, which provided a total assistance of $29 billion in 2002 to 56 countries all over the world. The commitment of the United Arab Emirates to provide emergency, long-term humanitarian assistance to areas affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts around the world was manifested in many activities, such as the operation of Emirates Solidarity, which succeeded in removing 60,000 landmines from 5 million square metres in South Lebanon and turned them into arable and inhabitable lands. The United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Society is the largest non-governmental agency in the country engaged in providing relief and foreign assistance to affected countries. It has provided a total assistance of $1 billion to more than 95 countries during the last 4 years. The United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Society provides directly and through the United Nations humanitarian agencies, relief and development assistance to countries affected by armed conflicts as well as to post-conflict countries, the latest of which was the reconstruction project of Jenin refugee camp. The Society is also preparing to build 200 houses in Rafah in Gaza. The Dubai Relief City, which was established in 2003 for the purpose of providing integrated services and facilities to national and international humanitarian organizations, is a clear manifestation of our commitment to support international efforts aimed at coordinating and enhancing global humanitarian assistance. Preparations are presently underway for the second Dubai International Conference on International Aid in April 2005. I also look forward to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which will be held in Japan in January 2005. We hope it will lead to strengthening international efforts aimed at mitigating natural disasters around the world.

Mrs. Barghouti (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): We learned today with great sadness of the passing of our President and leader, Yasser Arafat. We very much appreciate this gesture of holding a meeting this afternoon at the General Assembly during which all delegations will be able to present their condolences.

We would have hoped to be able to present to this Assembly a more optimistic and positive picture of the economic, social, cultural and environmental situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, while examining the item relating to assistance to the Palestinian people. But, unfortunately,

the situation of occupied Palestine is deteriorating day by day. We are risking an economic and humanitarian catastrophe, if the international community does not find rapid solutions in all areas and at all levels to put an end to this ongoing tragedy.

It is clear that the root causes for the deterioration in the current situation in occupied Palestine are essentially the continuing Israeli occupation, the creation of barriers, blockages, colonial expansionism, confiscation of land and the building of the expansionist wall, and the resultant confiscation of thousands of dunams of land and the ruining of the lives of thousands of Palestinians. Since September 2000, Israel has intensified its bloody war against the Palestinian people. That has led to about 3,500 deaths and 50,000 injuries; a lot of these people are permanently injured and cannot lead normal lives. Furthermore, the occupation forces have bombarded and destroyed a great number of public and private buildings, uprooted trees, and intentionally damaged the infrastructure, including roads and water and sanitation networks.

These Israeli practices against the Palestinian people are considered war crimes and flagrant violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which requires that the international community renew its efforts to put pressure on Israel to end the occupation and to apply its commitments in conformity with the provisions of the Convention. Israel should abide by the international will, which is asking it to stop its aggression, its destruction and its racist, expansionist policy. In this respect, we must underscore the individual and collective responsibility of the Contracting Parties to the Convention to ensure that the provisions of the Convention are respected and implemented in all areas.

The report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/59/121 refers in detail and comprehensively to the difficult situation facing the Palestinian people and the economic and humanitarian crises they are experiencing, which increases their suffering and creates difficulties in meeting their basic needs. The report also points to the problem of unemployment and the increasing levels of poverty, which have reached over 63 per cent in the West Bank and 75 per cent in the Gaza Strip. The report also refers to the fact that Israel has methodically imposed restrictions on the movement of goods and people within Palestine and across borders. The Secretary-General himself states in paragraph 11 that that continues "to be the proximate cause of the Palestinian humanitarian and economic crises".

The report also stresses in paragraph 9 that the occupying forces continue "to inflict daily hardship and humiliation on Palestinians, through closures, curfews, house demolitions, targeted assassinations, settlement activities, the use of deadly weapons in highly populated areas and the use of disproportionate force".

We are particularly concerned about the actions of the occupying forces against the institutions of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including the obstacles and difficulties they impose upon organizations that are trying to provide essential economic and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. The report points out that the occupying forces are imposing restrictions on the freedom of movement of United Nations staff and are obstructing humanitarian assistance, the result being that such assistance must be scaled back or completely halted. In fact, United Nations agencies are rendering assistance to the Palestinian people under very difficult conditions as a result of the measures employed by the occupying forces — assistance and support that the Palestinian people urgently need. In that regard, we agree with the report's observation, in paragraph 85, that "the significance of the United Nations agencies and their role in the occupied Palestinian territory has never been greater — nor has there ever been a time when it has been more difficult to operate".

In that regard, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report and for his efforts to support the Palestinians and their just cause. I would also like to convey our deep appreciation for the role of the United Nations and its relevant agencies in providing humanitarian and economic assistance to the Palestinian people, which undoubtedly contributes to alleviating their pain and suffering.

My delegation would like in particular to thank our brothers and sisters in Arab countries who have taken in the seriously wounded and provided medicines and emergency medical assistance, as well as for their great assistance in safeguarding the structure and functioning of the Palestinian Authority and in providing assistance to the Palestinian people in general. We also extend our thanks to all friendly

States, to the European Union and Japan in particular, for having provided us with humanitarian assistance and for having supported our people in general. In addition, we thank all the donor countries and non-governmental organizations that have provided emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people.

In that regard, we must firmly confront all Israeli measures against donor States and bodies, including assassinations and attacks carried out by Israel against the staff and headquarters of humanitarian agencies. The international community must provide protection for those extending assistance, in line with international humanitarian law.

I would like to add that just and lasting peace and stability in the region in general essentially requires not only the full withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the Golan, but also the exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination and to establish a sovereign State on their own territory. If that does not happen, there will be no possibility of making progress in the peace process. Nor will we be able to talk about regional development or regional cooperation with Israel, the occupying Power. We wish to underscore the importance of the role of the United Nations in bringing about just and lasting peace on the basis of its permanent responsibility with respect to the Palestinian issue.

I would like to conclude my statement by quoting again from the report of the Secretary-General. In paragraph 87 he states:

> "Humanitarian and financial assistance will not by themselves serve as a solution to the political crisis affecting the lives of the Palestinians and Israelis. A solution regarding the status of the Palestinian people, as well as the economic situation and humanitarian crisis, is linked directly to respect for international law and the achievement of a peaceful resolution of the conflict."

Mr. Zoumanigui (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): I would first of all like to convey the condolences of my delegation to the Palestinian people and to the family of the deceased President Arafat. We hope that God will be merciful on him and that his soul will rest in peace.

Allow me to thank the Secretary-General for his reports (A/59/93 and A/59/374) on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

My delegation supports the statement made by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, as well as the statement by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Union. I would now like to make a few comments in my national capacity.

The importance of considering this agenda item, which stems from resolution 46/182, led world leaders to underscore, in the Millennium Declaration and elsewhere, the importance of protecting vulnerable populations suffering from natural disasters, genocide, armed conflict and other humanitarian emergencies. Our consideration of the reports of the Secretary-General makes it possible for us to both catalogue the consequences of natural disasters and underscore the responsibilities of the international community and of regional, subregional and national actors in the areas of disaster prevention and management. In that regard, my delegation is pleased at the diversity of actors who provided humanitarian assistance during the past year. We should now assess their efforts in order to ascertain best practices.

With regard to the transition from relief to development, we commend the drafting of a report by the Joint Working Group on Transition Issues. We agree that United Nations bodies should define common measures to help United Nations country teams to collate and plan the principal elements of a transition strategy.

With respect to the issue of gender imbalance and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, we welcome the consideration of establishing a network of structures that lead to awareness-raising measures, while at the same time using legal instruments and therapy. It is my delegation's view that the Secretary-General's bulletin (ST/SGB/2003/13) on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is a handbook that should guide all the humanitarian actors.

On the same subject, implementation in the field of a complaint procedure is an encouraging step forward. This is also the case with the elaboration and launching by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of a gender resource package for people

working in peacekeeping. We also note with interest the importance of catastrophe prevention, as referred to in the report.

This year, the choice of the theme, "Learning from today's disasters for tomorrow's hazards", within the context of the celebration of the International Day for Disaster Reduction, should further mobilize the international community in the prevention and management of disasters. For that reason, my delegation supports the Secretary-General's suggestion that national capacities for planning and prevention be developed in countries affected by natural disasters, and we welcome the creation by United Nations bodies of the so-called virtual centre for the coordination of field operations.

With respect to the question of the security of United Nations and associated personnel and the staff of humanitarian organizations, as well as access to humanitarian aid for beneficiaries, we stress once again the obligation on all parties to respect the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. We agree with the Secretary-General on the obligation of parties to conflicts and local actors to respect the neutral, impartial nature of humanitarian operations being led by humanitarian actors. In return, however, these actors should take better account of the local dynamics and reassure the local population of the principles underlying their actions.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay due homage to United Nations and associated personnel and to the staff of humanitarian organizations for the courage, devotion and determination they demonstrate in carrying out their tasks, often in very difficult and dangerous circumstances.

The diversity of the humanitarian actors and the multidimensional character of the questions to be addressed require that there be better coordination within the United Nations system on the one hand, and on the other, between the United Nations and the other actors, namely, intergovernmental humanitarian organizations and regional, subregional and national organizations. Furthermore, the questions underlying the financing of humanitarian actions are of great concern despite the improvements that are taking place.

We note with satisfaction the proposal to increase the scope of use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund and support the Secretary-General's proposal to increase the ceiling to $100,000 allocated to a country that has suffered a disaster.

Once again, we appeal to donors to continue their efforts in mobilizing resources for disaster prevention, as well as for relief to victims of disaster. In that context, we fully support the solemn appeal by the representative of the African Union for the examination and adoption by consensus in the plenary of the draft resolution on the victims of the genocide in Rwanda.

With respect to complex emergency situations, my delegation welcomes the reference made to the West African region and to the consideration of an intervention at the subregional level. The Assembly will understand my delegation's position because it is known that countries emerging from conflict in that region — that is, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire — share a common frontier with my country, which since 1989 has continued to provide a generous welcome to refugees. Above all, the humanitarian, social and economic, environmental and security consequences faced by Guinea as a result of this influx of refugees have been aggravated by the rebel attacks of 2000 coming from our frontiers with Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Aware of the requirements for peace, security and good cooperation, the Government of Guinea has always been involved in the search for solutions to conflicts and the consolidation of peace for the benefit of all the people of the subregion. The holding in Conakry, on 20 May 2004, of a summit of the heads of State of the Mano River Union, which was enlarged to include the heads of State of Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, was a reflection of that determination.

At the international level, the Government has continued to appeal to the international community to find a viable solution to the humanitarian consequences still facing my country. While the meeting of the consultative group on Guinea in Paris on 25 and 26 June 1998 — organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank — and the 9 July 1998 Day of Solidarity with Guinea, organized in New York by the Department of Political Affairs and UNDP, were encouraging signs, it should be pointed out that there has not been appropriate follow-up at the international level. In that context, my delegation would like to emphasize that the Republic of Guinea, which remains faithful to its

African humanism and respects its international commitments, will continue to demonstrate understanding in the management of conflicts in the subregion and the humanitarian questions on its own territory.

However, my delegation wishes to stress that the international community should follow the example of Guinea, which has fulfilled its duties of responsibility- and burden-sharing, and assume its responsibilities and confront current challenges. Today, the south-east of Guinea continues to be a subject of concern for my Government. We hope that the international community, and the United Nations in particular, will not delay in contributing to the search for a durable solution in order to prevent the whole subregion from being affected.

Finally, it should be said that the consequences of natural and man-made disasters affect millions of people, particularly the vulnerable — namely, women, children and the elderly. They are the involuntary victims of tragedies and they require all our assistance. We welcome the inclusion of an item on limiting the consequences of natural disasters in the agenda for the international meeting for the 10-year review of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

We continue to believe that the meeting — and also the World Conference on Disaster Reduction to be held in Kobe, Japan, from 18 to 22 January 2005 — will have a positive outcome. My country, the Republic of Guinea, which has particular interest in this issue, will be present at those meetings and will not fail to make its contribution.

Mr. Ercin (Turkey): At the outset, I would like to extend our profound condolences to the Palestinian people on the grave loss of their leader.

Turkey associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union on the agenda item that we are discussing today. I would like to expound on some of our views, particularly with respect to the Secretary-General's report entitled "International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development", contained in document A/59/374.

Premature loss of life due to natural disasters continues to affect a great number of people worldwide, hitting vulnerable groups particularly hard. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, it is estimated that in 2003 and 2004 natural disasters claimed the lives of 75,000 people, affected more than 284 million people and caused more than $65 billion worth of material damage. We should pause a moment and consider that we are talking about human lives here, not just numbers.

In his report, the Secretary-General emphasizes, this year again, the disturbing upward trend in the occurrence and impact of natural disasters. The Secretary-General also underlines the fact that natural and man-made emergencies will continue to increase in their regularity and intensity owing to current trends in urbanization, environmental degradation and climate change. It is becoming more obvious than ever that, without coordinated efforts to improve preparedness and response and address risk and vulnerability, the effects of disasters on people and human settlements will become more deadly and costly.

It is incumbent upon every responsible member of the international community to join forces in tackling these challenges. In fact, given the nature of today's interconnected world, there is no alternative to that approach. My country has been a keen supporter of increased international cooperation in countering such emergencies.

Turkey finds itself, in its geography, prone to natural disasters, in that Mother Nature has repeatedly displayed in our country the less friendly side of her strength and ferociousness. The massive earthquakes in 1999 led to great human and material losses. On the bright side, however, there were positive outcomes as well. Recognizing their shared vulnerability and the virtue in pooling their efforts together, Turkey and Greece established the Joint Hellenic Turkish Standby Disaster Response Unit (JHET-SDRU) to provide timely and effective humanitarian assistance when necessary.

Among the lessons drawn from the 1999 earthquakes was the recognition of the importance of strengthening international urban search and rescue assistance and rendering it more effective. With that in mind Turkey assumed the responsibility of presenting a new resolution on this topic to the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly in 2002. Resolution 57/150 was the product of long and lengthy deliberations and discussions. Operative paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 57/150 requests the Secretary-

General to submit a comprehensive, updated report with recommendations on progress in the improvement of efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of international urban search and rescue assistance, taking into account the extent of utilization of the Guidelines of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group.

We would like to thank the Secretariat for the Secretary-General's combined report contained in A/59/374, which was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 58/25 and 57/150. We welcome all the efforts to streamline the work of the United Nations, and we consider that compilation of reports on similar issues is a positive step in that direction, as long as these reports strive to reflect all the developments and the progress made on the issues at hand.

The merits of the report are evident. Nonetheless, after very careful consideration, we have concluded that the relevant parts of the report fall short of our expectations. In our opinion, it is not as comprehensive as we would have wished. Indeed, important developments that have taken place on international urban search and rescue operations since 2002 are not adequately reflected in the report. For instance, more information could have been provided for the activities of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG); it would have been useful to include references to the standardization of the INSARAG guidelines. The measures taken to overcome administrative difficulties in search and rescue operations should have been mentioned in a more detailed manner.

Some general recommendations are not sufficient to contribute to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of international urban search and rescue operations.

In addition, the late issuance of the report left very little time for Member States to form their positions. For that reason, we decided not to rush to submit a resolution on urban search and rescue assistance. Instead of repeating the resolution 57/150 wording once again, we will work, with the cooperation of all parties concerned, to review what has been done so far in this period; take stock of related activities; and consider to formulate a draft resolution that will focus on progress in the improvement of efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of international urban search and rescue assistance, particularly taking into account the extent of utilization of the INSARAG Guidelines.

Mr. Adel (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to support the statement of the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the statement of the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Group. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for presenting the documents on this very important and vital issue on our agenda, to which Egypt attaches special importance.

Promoting the coordination of humanitarian assistance extended by the United Nations in cases of disaster, including special economic assistance, should be a main priority of the United Nations and other relevant United Nations organizations and specialized agencies. Egypt reaffirms once again that supporting and building the institutional capacities of countries requires the support and coordinating of cooperation between the different systems working in the area of humanitarian assistance to face natural disasters and the impact of wars and conflicts. This is carried out through implementation of a comprehensive method for dealing with natural disasters in all areas, starting with the early warning phase, followed by the relief phase, then by reconstruction and development. Egypt calls upon all donor States and international financing institutions to increase their contribution to provide relief and humanitarian assistance. This is so not only in response to the magnitude of crises and disasters in the last few years, but also in implementation of the principle of international solidarity and interdependence and in implementation of the spirit and letter of the United Nations Charter.

The reports of the Secretary-General (A/59/93 and A/59/374) affirm that natural disasters and environmental emergencies constitute a grave danger that threatens the poorest people in the world. In the year 2003, 700 natural disasters occurred, which led to the death of 75,000 people, and economic losses that exceeded $75 billion. This rate of casualties is nearly seven times that of the previous year.

On the other hand, we would like to note that the pattern of financing humanitarian assistance is still not adequate, since a number of adversely impacted countries got only five per cent of their needs in 2003. I have provided these examples and figures to clarify the extent of the gap between the number of disasters

and suffering and what is available at the moment in terms of humanitarian assistance.

In this context, my delegation calls upon the relevant organizations and donor States to take into consideration the recommendations contained in the two reports of the Secretary-General, also, to support the current preparatory work for the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which will be held next January in Japan, and to use the opportunity provided by the Conference to reaffirm once again the policies of disaster reduction and its promotion.

There can be no doubt as to the imperative need for the provision of humanitarian assistance, a task undertaken by the United Nations in many parts of the world. However, it is a task fraught with risk and difficulties. It requires that ways and means be found to safeguard the safety and security of United Nations staff and of personnel working for humanitarian assistance organizations, so that they can fully carry out their duties.

We have noted with increasing concern, as stated in the Secretary-General's report (A/59/332), the continuous exposure of United Nations personnel to risks that include kidnapping, physical violence, robbery, theft, intimidation and long-term detention. A new and more dangerous pattern has emerged, as manifested in the direct attack on United Nations headquarters that occurred in Baghdad in August last. Egypt believes that there is an urgent need for the United Nations to take an active role in expanding and safeguarding protection for those who work in the area of humanitarian assistance, and it emphasizes the fact that such protection should not be merely legal in nature. We must concentrate on promoting the political will of States, whether or not there is a host country agreement with the United Nations.

My delegation looks forward to receiving the report of the Secretary-General next year on this issue concerning the establishment of the necessary structures, arrangements and capacity-building to promote the effectiveness of the United Nations security system.

I shall now touch on ways of providing assistance to the Palestinian people. I should like to begin by extending my sincere condolences on the passing of their late President and leader, Yasser Arafat. His passing is not a loss only to the Palestinian people but to the world as a whole. I am fully confident that the Palestinian people and their new leadership will spare no effort in working to restore their right to live like the rest of humankind — as free citizens in an independent State.

Egypt calls on the international community once again to intervene decisively in order to deal with the humanitarian catastrophe that the Palestinian people are facing. Daily they must endure unprecedented suffering, and therefore efforts must be made to address the tragic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

What the Palestinian people are facing, under the yoke of Israeli occupation, not only is destroying the infrastructure of the West Bank and Gaza, and the financial and natural resources of the Palestinian people; it is a blatant violation of their legitimate and inalienable rights. The practices of the Israeli army extend to targeting unarmed civilians, many of them women and children, as well as extra-judicial executions and collective punishment through the imposition of siege and closures.

Sieges, closures and curfews have led to a total paralysis of the Palestinian economy, and more than a million Palestinians are living in terrible poverty. In addition, Israeli operations have displaced nearly 10,000 Palestinians, who now have no shelter at all.

The report of the Secretary-General (A/59/121) has noted another negative element which has led to increased suffering on the part of the Palestinian people: the construction of the separation wall and its impact on the lives of the Palestinians and on the territorial integrity of a future Palestinian State. This jeopardizes the two-State solution set out in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002).

Egypt appreciates the positive role undertaken by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, and particularly what the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is doing for 4 million Palestinian refugees.

Egypt calls on donor States to increase their support for such activities by providing the necessary financial assistance to breach the current financing gap so as to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians and to take a firm stand regarding

any practices that hinder the delivery of such assistance to those who need it.

Egypt would request that the report of the Secretary-General to be presented next year include an analysis of the activities of the United Nations with respect to the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the difficulties it faces in providing humanitarian assistance. Even more importantly, proposals on how to deal with these difficulties should be made in order to enable the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council to adopt appropriate resolutions in this area.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize that we believe that the assistance provided to the Palestinian people is only a first step. It is a means and not an end. The goal is clear: for the Palestinian people to be able to determine their destiny freely, in an independent and sovereign State capable of economic development. To that end, we must ensure the implementation of all relevant resolutions of the United Nations, particularly resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and subsequent international, national and regional resolutions and initiatives, which emphasize the linkage between economic and political issues.

Mr. De Rivero (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like at the outset to express the condolences of the delegation of Peru to the delegation of Palestine on the death of President Yasser Arafat.

Today we are seeing a trend towards increased humanitarian action on the part of the United Nations. We are not only protecting civilians in armed conflict, but also providing assistance in the aftermath of natural disasters. Such efforts represent the very essence of humanitarian work. However, we are now moving into other areas of operation ranging from gender issues to the process of transition to development, to AIDS.

I think that today it can be said that humanitarian work is becoming the principal activity of the United Nations. Although this seems to us here at the United Nations to be a normal state of affairs, it is seen very differently in many academic circles and by contemporary international-relations analysts.

Many of them quite rightly believe that the expansion of the humanitarian work of the United Nations is a very clear indication that the Organization is failing in the fulfilment of its principal mandate — the maintenance of international peace and security. Today the proliferation of unresolved civil conflicts is creating a series of humanitarian crises on a vast scale, which are transforming the United Nations — without us hardly noticing it — into a kind of global intensive-care operation. It is as if we were becoming another large-scale global Red Cross.

The truth is that, although the primary mission of the United Nations is to maintain peace and security, it finds itself doing principally humanitarian work. We should therefore be concerned at the fact that, as the scope of humanitarian assistance work expands, insufficient efforts are being made to resolve the conflicts that are multiplying throughout the developing world.

For that reason, it is important that reports on humanitarian assistance in conflict situations call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility for the prevention and resolution of conflicts — conflicts which are giving rise to the need for humanitarian assistance.

The main function of humanitarian assistance is to alleviate human suffering, but today we are extending it to include transition to development. This concept of transition to development is confusing. In one of his reports, the Secretary-General himself admits that and states that it leads to differing interpretations that make financial contributions more difficult.

My delegation agrees with the Secretary-General when he states that the concept of transition to development is confusing. But it is also illusory, because it makes us think that development is just around the corner, when in reality development has become a quest that is as elusive as the quest for El Dorado. According to the Human Development Reports of the World Bank and the report of the world summit in Geneva, of the 140 developing countries, only 13 saw growth of more than 3 per cent in personal income in the past 23 years. The great majority of developing countries saw no growth in personal income, or growth of less than 3 per cent, which is the minimum needed to begin to conquer poverty.

Therefore, today's grave world economic situation is not exactly a situation of transition to development. More than 4.8 billion people — nearly two thirds of humanity — are living on $2 a day. The Millennium Declaration is therefore realistic; it aims

not at development, but at reducing poverty, which is not the same thing.

For all of those reasons, my delegation fully agrees on the need for a more realistic and more modest approach in the post-assistance period, which should only extend over a limited time period following a humanitarian crisis or disaster. The post-assistance phase should not be considered a metaphysical period of transition to development, because that term can be confused with nation-building — something that is very difficult to achieve and that can ultimately discourage financing for humanitarian and rehabilitation purposes, since it is extremely difficult to determine how long the transition to elusive development will last. That is how we interpret the conclusions of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs/United Nations Development Group Working Group on Transition Issues.

My delegation is convinced that the most effective and least controversial humanitarian activity of the United Nations is disaster relief. Although humanitarian aid in conflict situations has sometimes brought harsh criticism of the Organization and sometimes generates politicized spin concerning humanitarian aid, that has not been the case with natural disasters. No population forgets the United Nations flag unfurled a few hours after an earthquake, a flood or a hurricane, as was recently the case with Hurricanes Ivan and Jeanne in Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, and with the earthquakes in Turkey and Iran.

From the creation of the United Nations Disaster Relief Office — a joint initiative of Peru, Turkey and other countries — to the establishment of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team, humanitarian disaster relief has only enhanced the Organization's prestige. One can say that in natural disasters, the United Nations is in a win-win position in comparison with other humanitarian activities. For those reasons, Peru supported Turkey's initiative and was a sponsor of General Assembly resolution 57/150, adopted by consensus, which was aimed at strengthening the effectiveness and coordination of urban search and rescue assistance. We asked the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to disseminate that resolution broadly so that countries can take it into account in their national plans to deal with natural disasters.

Today, natural disasters — particularly those of a hydrological nature, such as hurricanes, floods, cyclones, droughts and famine — are increasing. Therefore, United Nations activities in the area of natural disasters will have to be strengthened. In that respect, we must lend our full support to OCHA. The increase in natural disasters also requires coordinated and joint efforts at the regional level. Recently, the countries members of the Andean Community adopted the Andean disaster prevention and response strategy. The Andean strategy will enable us to incorporate disaster reduction, as both a prevention policy and a development strategy, into the national agendas of the five members of the Community. The main subjects being developed will relate to five thematic clusters of our strategy, such as the strengthening of institutions, information and early warning systems, scientific and technological research, mutual disaster relief and a culture of prevention for the population.

It is worth mentioning that in August 2004 Peru hosted a meeting of the INSARAG Regional Group of the Americas, which is aimed specifically at strengthening technical disaster management capacities in the Latin American and Caribbean region. We hope that the World Conference on Disaster Reduction to be held at Kobe next year will provide an opportunity to work on reducing vulnerability to disasters and that it will produce commitments and positive initiatives.

In that context, I should like to highlight what the Secretary-General pointed out in his report with regard to private sector participation in support of humanitarian emergency responses. In fact, it would be very appropriate to think about promoting private participation to support disaster responses. I am sure that many companies that engage in global commerce would be interested in participating. Perhaps we should promote a compact between multinational enterprises and the United Nations aimed at disaster relief.

Moreover, in the light of the Organization's enormous experience and prestige in the area of disaster relief, OCHA should publish an annual report on its activities related to natural disasters, in which it could assess its experiences and make recommendations to further improve these important activities, which will have to be expanded in the future,

given the greater frequency of disasters due to global warming.

In conclusion, I cannot fail to pay tribute to all the men and women who have sacrificed their lives for human dignity, in keeping with their humanitarian responsibility, and to express once again my thanks and wishes for success to the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland.

Mr. Mpundu (Zambia): On behalf of my Government, I wish to express our sincere condolences to the Palestinian National Authority on the demise of President Yasser Arafat. Zambia recalls his extraordinary leadership.

I should like to commend the Secretary-General for the reports contained in documents A/59/93, A/58/293 and A/59/374, on emergency humanitarian assistance. My delegation finds those reports to be very useful. My delegation also commends the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, for his detailed briefing on the subject on 10 November 2004. Zambia agrees with his assessment of the situation and shares his concerns about the decline in the resources that are being provided to meet the demands of humanitarian assistance worldwide.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Union. We agree with the view that humanitarian assistance must be extended to the genocide survivors in the Republic of Rwanda and elsewhere. In order to raise the profile of this agenda item, it is my delegation's view that this issue should continue to be dealt with in plenary meetings of the General Assembly.

We also align ourselves with the statement delivered by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Owing to the worldwide increase in the demand for humanitarian assistance, it is of primary importance to develop a coordinated approach with regard to how that assistance is delivered, in order to ensure that there is no duplication of programmes and that costs can be held down.

In view of the many factors involved in the implementation of humanitarian activities, it is imperative to exercise an optimal and comprehensive cooperation strategy in order to achieve the intended results. Coordination brings about efficiency in the utilization of limited resources. In that regard, my delegation wishes to commend the efforts of the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator over the past year, as outlined in his reports.

While financial and material resources are necessary for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the success of that assistance is largely dependent upon the conduciveness of the environment. My delegation is aware of the many challenges under which emergency relief is delivered, especially in conflict situations. It is for that reason that the safety and protection of humanitarian personnel is paramount. That protection must be a shared responsibility of the international community. We call upon Member States to cooperate with the United Nations to ensure the safety of humanitarian assistance and field staff.

The continuing strife around the world has resulted in increased demand for humanitarian assistance. In that regard, we welcome the launch by the Secretary-General of an appeal to Member States to raise an estimated $1.7 billion to support humanitarian activities.

At this juncture, I wish to say a few words about my country, Zambia, and our experiences with disaster relief management. After years of food deficit, my Government put in place during the 2002-2003 agricultural season measures designed to promote agricultural production to increase food security in the country. Among others, such measures included the introduction of an agriculture import-support programme targeting vulnerable members of our communities through the provision of agricultural inputs, the introduction of outgrower schemes, the development of fisheries and the promotion of irrigation schemes. Those measures have further enhanced the capacity of the Government to respond to humanitarian situations in the country. I am pleased to say that, as a result of that agriculture policy, Zambia has moved from deficit to surplus production, with an estimated production of 1.12 million metric tonnes of maize in the 2002-2003 farming season.

Through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, my delegation would like to appeal to the Secretary-General to support Zambia's capacity-building in order to enable it to respond to humanitarian situations.

In May of this year, the Government of the Republic of Zambia declared the HIV/AIDS pandemic a national disaster. The pandemic mostly affects the productive age group of our society. That disease should be confronted with the same vigour as other disasters. Accordingly, my Government will continue to count on the international community for support to conquer that scourge.

In conclusion, my delegation appreciates the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in particular as regards the issues that the Emergency Relief Coordinator has brought to the fore in his reports. It is now up to Member States to provide the resources required to confront the looming humanitarian crises around the world.

Mr. Chulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to begin my statement by expressing my sincere condolences to the leadership of the Palestinian people and the family of President Arafat on the passing away of President Arafat.

The Russian Federation commends the activities of the United Nations system aimed at strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. We note the leading role played in that process by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We stress in particular the efforts aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the respective coordination mechanisms and instruments while taking into account new humanitarian activities related, first of all, to the increased global terrorist threat and the risks taken by humanitarian workers in the field.

The problem of ensuring the physical safety of humanitarian personnel has recently become a particularly urgent matter. In that connection, we emphasize the need to take effective measures in that area in accordance with the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. We also deem it necessary to work for a broader scope of legal protection for United Nations personnel by finalizing the protocol to the Convention. We note the efforts of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to develop a general framework for the establishment of relations between humanitarian and military organizations in complex emergency situations. It is vital to stress that, in its search for an adequate response to new challenges and threats, the humanitarian community should consistently be guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. At the same time, as was justly stressed in the report (A/59/332) of the Secretary-General, humanitarian personnel should observe generally accepted and locally agreed security practices and be sensitive to local traditions and customs.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict has recently been among the priority problems on the international humanitarian agenda. Despite the whole range of current international instruments on human rights and international humanitarian law it is still innocent civilians — including children, women, older persons and those belonging to what are usually referred to as vulnerable groups — who are the first affected in armed conflict. The situation regarding the protection of civilians calls for systematic and coordinated measures at the international, regional and national levels. Account should be taken of the problem of protecting civilians, which has both a human rights and a humanitarian dimension. It is obvious that the humanitarian component is now very much in demand, especially as an element of an overall strategy aimed at crisis prevention, as well as at the various stages of post-conflict settlement. There is no doubt that humanitarian work should be based on the norms of the Charter of the United Nations and basic humanitarian principles. Its effectiveness depends largely upon how it is inscribed in the efforts of the international community aimed at political settlement.

Post-conflict peacebuilding and rehabilitation and prioritizing the matter of transitioning from relief to development continue to be urgent issues. We believe that effective and smooth transition to development is key to the success of international humanitarian and post-conflict peacebuilding efforts and to laying the groundwork for dynamic social and economic development. We believe that at the stage of deploying a humanitarian operation, attention should be paid to planning and programming of development-oriented elements of assistance. All this requires an adequate and coordinated response on the part of the international community, with the United Nations playing the leading role.

We note an increased interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council with regard to post-conflict situations. We believe that this will help the United Nations system organizations to balance and coordinate their efforts in this area.

In the current situation there is a growing need to predict emergencies, take preventive measures and ensure a timely response on the part of both national and international humanitarian agencies. In this regard adequate measures should be provided in cooperation with national governments to reinforce planning mechanisms for emergencies.

We support continued efforts to strengthen national early warning systems, assess damage and mitigate the consequences of natural disasters. All this should facilitate the creation of a global network for urgent warning in case of major emergencies in order to ensure coordination among national rescue agencies and adjust the mechanisms allowing effective use of the available national potential in international rescue operations.

The Russian Federation attaches great importance to global efforts to implement the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and we consider commitment to its purposes a key prerequisite to attain the Millennium Development Goals, especially in vulnerable countries and regions of the world. We welcome the work done by the secretariat for the Strategy to prepare the World Conference on Disaster Reduction to be held in January 2005 in Kobe. We believe that the Conference should become an important stage in international efforts to reduce the threat of disasters, and to further improve the United Nations work in this area through a global assessment of the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World. Russia is participating actively in the preparation of the Conference and is making a concrete contribution to its organization.

A key task is to further improve tools for the mobilization of funds and, at the same time, to enlarge the donor base. The Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeals remains the main mechanism in this process. Their preparation procedure and structure should be further enhanced. Furthermore, quite a number of them still lack resources. In this regard it would be expedient to provide the appeals with flexibility allowing non-traditional donors, including those who are ready to render humanitarian assistance in kind, to increase their participation in international humanitarian cooperation.

Russia commends the United Nations efforts to draw the attention of international public opinion to the problems of the so-called forgotten emergencies. We share the view that such situations cause human suffering no less that those that are closely followed by the international community. We are continuing to provide our contribution to humanitarian assistance in many countries of the world. As was the case last year, we provided humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iran, China, Algeria, Ecuador, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Moldova and provided voluntary contributions to the World Food Programme to provide assistance to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Angola, and to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the region of Southern Africa in the amount of 11 million dollars and 2 million dollars respectively. Next year we are going to maintain our contribution to the World Food Programme in the amount of 11 million dollars. These figures also prove that our country is gradually restoring its donor potential.

It is to a large extent through the humanitarian activities that the United Nations has wielded its political and moral authority in the world. And it is within our means to further reinforce its role in the world.

Programme of work

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to make an announcement concerning the programme of work of the plenary meeting of the General Assembly. On the morning of Tuesday, 23 November 2004, the General Assembly will consider agenda item 163, entitled "The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan". The list of speakers on this question is now open.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.